

oil is making big money, and that is the Republicans' priority. I urge President Bush to end the rhetoric, put the troops first, get off of big oil's wagon, and let's get together to solve this problem for real.

I thank the chair and yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, all across America today, people are looking to Capitol Hill with astonishment. They are wondering how it is even possible that lawmakers who have been hearing from their constituents for months about the burden of record-high gas prices could fail to work out a sensible response.

I don't blame them. High gas prices have triggered a crisis in American homes and in the broader economy, and the American people have a right to expect their elected representatives to do something about it.

Every crisis is a call for leadership, and this one was no different. This was an opportunity for the Democrats who control Congress to demonstrate courage and resolve. They squandered it. In their hunt for more seats in Congress and control of the White House, they took the path of least resistance. They decided that they could increase their hold on Congress by avoiding tough votes, and then blaming the mess that followed on a party that wasn't even in charge.

While Republicans were working out a legislation solution that addressed high gas prices head on, Democrats embarked on a concerted effort of pointing fingers and casting blame. Americans were looking for answers, and the Democrat answer was to make everyone accountable but themselves.

First came the energy producers, who were threatened with higher taxes that would have passed along to consumers, making the problem worse. Then came the foreign oil producers, who were threatened with lawsuits unless they increased production, even though America sits on massive energy reserves that dwarf their own.

Finally, it was the speculators. Citing the testimony of a lawyer whose previous statements on energy provoked a stinging bipartisan rebuke, the Democrats claimed that writing a few new regulations for speculators would solve the energy crisis. Republicans agree that we need greater transparency in the market and more cops on the beat. But the notion that speculators alone have led to a dramatic surge in gas prices is, according to every serious person, completely and totally absurd.

The chairman of the Federal Reserve has rejected the idea that speculators alone were the cause of the oil shock. Warren Buffett, a prominent Democrat and perhaps the most successful investor of our generation, has said specu-

lators alone are not the problem. The 27-member International Energy Agency said speculators alone are not the problem. T. Boone Pickens, who has been cited by both sides in this debate, has said unequivocally that speculators alone were not the problem.

When asked about high gas prices, all the experts seem to agree on two things: first, that speculators alone are not the problem. And second, that the high price of gas is primarily the result of increased demand and static supply. Increase supply, and the price of gas will go down. Keep it static and prices will continue to rise. That is why even the liberal New York Times derided the Democrats' speculators-only approach as a "misbegotten plan."

Republicans didn't invent the law of supply and demand. It's as old as commerce itself. And it has the virtue of being perfectly straightforward: any serious proposal for bringing down high gas prices would have to increase supply. And any serious proposal that aims to decrease our dependence on Middle East oil would have to increase supply here at home.

Every expert in America tells us that Americans will be dependent on fossil-fuels for decades to come. And until the day when we're all plugging in our cars or using alternative fuels, Americans can't be expected to shoulder the crushing burden of ever increasing gas prices. Congress has a responsibility to act, and that action must involve a comprehensive approach.

This is why Republicans put together a solution to this crisis that seeks, first of all, to accelerate the day when America will no longer be dependent on foreign sources of oil. We do this in our plan by addressing not only the principal cause of rising fuel prices—insufficient supply—but also by promoting new energy technologies, such as plug-in hybrid cars and trucks.

We heard the concerns of the American people, brought together the best ideas from both sides of the aisle, and pressed forward, confident that here was a solution that would be embraced by Americans and acceptable to a majority in Congress who could claim shared credit for the result. But, in the end, the Democrat Leadership showed it would rather cast blame than share success.

Americans are wondering why the Democrat Leadership voted to leave town last night without proposing a comprehensive solution of their own to \$4-a-gallon gasoline. And they deserve an honest answer. The moment that gas prices became a major issue here in Washington, Democrats started to build a protective blockade around their Presidential nominee.

Rather than come up with a comprehensive solution that would do something to lower the price of gas, they set out to insulate their candidate from ever having to take a difficult vote on the issue. They have done this because their nominee opposes expanding the domestic energy supply. Recall

that his initial response to high energy costs was that Americans would have to learn to turn their air conditioners down and consume fewer calories.

He has stated publicly that high gas prices are only a problem because America didn't have enough time to adjust to them. And just this week the junior Senator from Illinois unveiled his own comprehensive solution to the high price of gas: "We could save all the oil that they're talking about getting off drilling," he said, "If everybody was just inflating their tires and getting regular tune-ups."

This is the proposal of the man that Democrats in Congress want to lead us through the Nation's energy crisis: regular tune-ups. This is the answer the junior Senator from Illinois has proposed to the patients at the Woodland Dialysis Center in Elizabethtown, KY, who are now limiting their treatments because they can't afford the cost of getting to them. This is Senator OBAMA's answer to \$4-a-gallon gas: issue some new regulations and go to Jiffy Lube.

Add it to the growing list of laughably inadequate proposals that our Democrat friends have brought forward over the last few months. Some of them wanted to sue foreign countries as a way of forcing them to open up their supplies. Others proposed tax incentives for riding bicycles to work. But Senate Democrats really outdid themselves earlier this summer when they showed off a two-seat, electric-powered Tesla Roadster. It gets excellent mileage, and any American family can buy one of its own for a mere \$109,000. These are the kinds of solutions we have heard from the other side.

Over the last few weeks, the time for real action arrived. And when it did, the Democratic leadership blocked and stalled every attempt to advance a real solution to the energy crisis. They canceled appropriations hearings out of fear that a deep-sea exploration amendment to lower gas prices would be offered. They offered a speculation-only bill, which no serious person thinks is in itself the answer to \$4-a-gallon gas. And then over the last 7 days, they tried to take us off the issue of high gas prices seven times. Seven times they have tried to take us off the issue of high gas prices, taunting Republicans for standing on principle rather than taking the bait. In every case, Republicans refused to turn their backs on the people at the pump.

These last few weeks were a time for decision, and the Democrats made theirs. When Americans demanded action, the Democrats played games. They changed the topic so the man they want to lead our country would not have to make a public decision about high gas prices.

Some on the other side may think this kind of behavior is acceptable. They might think it makes sense to block the Senate minority from offering a balanced solution to high gas

prices in order to protect one Senator and the 20 percent of Americans who think we should not use more energy from American soil. We couldn't disagree more.

When faced with a crisis, the Democratic leadership opted instead to follow the political playbook of the senior Senator from New York who recently told a reporter that Democrats should wait until after Inauguration Day—when he hopes to see a Democrat in the White House—before doing anything about high gas prices.

This is precisely the kind of statement that frustrates the American people. They have waited for a solution long enough. They should not have to wait another day.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIDWESTERN DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, for the benefit of leaders' offices, after I am done speaking about the flood situation in Iowa, I have been asked by the leader to make a unanimous consent request in regard to E-Verify. So I want to notice the offices about what I am going to do. It will be down the road, in half an hour or so.

Mr. President, last night I came to the floor to ask for unanimous consent on the tax bill we referred to as the Midwest flood disaster tax relief package. I was denied unanimous consent to bring that up. I did not make a long justification for the necessity of doing that, but I wish to speak to that point now. I am not going to further ask unanimous consent the same as I did last night; I am just going to speak about why I did it last night and why it was essential.

There is one thing I want to put in the RECORD at this point, and it is in regard to one of the points that was made by the Senator from Illinois last night, Mr. DURBIN, the Democratic whip. He said one of the reasons for denying my request for the tax relief package I am talking about for flood victims in the Midwest is because similar provisions were contained in S. 3335, the Jobs, Energy, Families, and Disaster Relief Act of 2008, and that bill did not get 60 votes. Obviously, it didn't get 60 votes for the reason a lot of other bills have not gotten 60 votes on the floor of the Senate: We in the minority want to stay on the No. 1 problem affecting this country; that is, the high cost of gasoline and the energy crisis that is facing the Nation. We want the majority party to give us opportunities to offer amendments to increase the supply of energy in this country as opposed to paying \$140 a

barrel to buy oil and import it from overseas, giving money to nations that want to train terrorists to kill Americans. That is the reason S. 3335 did not get 60 votes. So we are technically on the Energy bill.

But one of the things he said about that bill was to leave the impression that S. 3335 did everything that needs to be done for the disaster relief in the Midwest, and it doesn't, and I made that point last night, so I am not going to repeat that.

But even if S. 3335 had passed, we had previously had a Statement of Administration Policy, and I am only going to quote one sentence from a longer Statement of Administration Policy that I am going to put in the RECORD, and that sentence is this: "However, due to other objections to the bill, should it be presented to the President in its current form, his senior advisers would recommend a veto." So I think that when we are under a situation where we have the trauma of floods and people being homeless because of the flooding situation in the Midwest, it doesn't do much good to pass a piece of legislation that is going to be vetoed by the White House anyway.

The point I was trying to make last night is that we shouldn't be adjourning for our summer August break and not taking care of things in the Midwest the very same way we took care of the situation for New Orleans caused by Katrina. Of course, the point is that the legislation we seek for the Midwest is the same as the legislation we sought and we actually accomplished for New Orleans.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the full Statement of Administration Policy from which I quoted.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET,

Washington, DC, July 30, 2008.

STATEMENT OF ADMINISTRATION POLICY S. 3335—JOBS, ENERGY, FAMILIES, AND DISASTER RELIEF ACT OF 2008

The Administration supports responsible and timely alternative minimum tax (AMT) relief as proposed in the President's Budget. Congress should act quickly to protect 26 million American taxpayers from an unwelcome tax increase and to avoid repeating the unnecessary administrative complexity caused by congressional delay in 2007. In addition, the Administration supports the extension of the tax credit for research and experimentation (R&E) expenses, incentives for charitable giving, subpart F active financing and look-through exceptions, and the new markets tax credit. In its FY 2009 Budget, the Administration proposed that several of these provisions be made permanent, including the R&E tax credit. However, due to other objections to the bill, should it be presented to the President in its current form, his senior advisers would recommend a veto.

The Administration strongly supports continuation of tax incentives for renewable energy, and in fact the President recently proposed a more effective approach that would

reform today's complicated mix of incentives to make the commercialization and use of new, lower emission technologies more competitive. The President's proposal would consolidate this mix into a single expanded program that would be carbon-weighted, technology-neutral, and long-lasting. This policy would make lower emission power sources less expensive relative to higher emission sources while taking into account our Nation's energy security needs. It would take the government out of picking technology winners and losers in this emerging market. And it would provide a positive and reliable market signal for technology investment and investment in domestic manufacturing capacity and infrastructure.

Overall, the Administration does not believe that efforts to avoid tax increases on Americans need to be coupled with provisions to increase revenue. Although the Senate has avoided pairing AMT relief with tax increases, the bill contains a host of objectionable provisions. The Administration strongly opposes the provision in the bill that would subject U.S. companies to continued double taxation by further delaying the effect of new rules for allocating worldwide interest for foreign tax credit purposes. The Administration also strongly opposes the provision in the bill that would treat U.S. citizens with deferred compensation from certain employers—in all industries—more unfavorably than other U.S. citizens. Together, these provisions would increase tax burdens, undermine the competitiveness of U.S. workers and businesses, and could have adverse effects on the U.S. economy. The Administration also opposes the continued expansion of tax-credit bonds and the reinstatement of the exclusion from tax of amounts received under qualified group legal services plans. The Administration urges Congress to eliminate all such provisions from the final bill.

The Administration also strongly opposes the provision in the bill to increase cash balances in the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund by transferring \$8 billion from the General Fund. It is a longstanding principle that highway construction and maintenance should be funded by those who use the highway system. Instead, this provision is both a gimmick and a dangerous precedent that shifts costs from users to taxpayers at large. Moreover, the provision would unnecessarily increase the deficit and would place any hope of future, responsible constraints on highway spending in jeopardy. This provision is unnecessary, because the Administration has proposed a responsible alternative that protects taxpayers.

Finally, the Administration objects to a budget gimmick in the bill that would raise revenues by modifying the tax treatment of deferred compensation over the current budget window, but allow this provision to expire so that it, like the new rules for allocating worldwide interest for foreign tax credit purposes, will return to be available as a "revenue-raiser" in next year's ten-year budget window. These types of gimmicks, done for so-called "pay as you go" reasons, harm the integrity of the tax code and increase uncertainty for taxpayers.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, before I speak to the point, just so you know, in Iowa the flood situation is very much in the headlines. I think one of the problems we are having in the Midwest, in getting Congress to pay attention to the problems that remain from the flooding of June, is that it is not constantly on television. It is not on television all the time. Of course, for 2 months, 3 months, the situation

in New Orleans was constantly on television, and Congress responded.

Mr. President, I see the whip here, and maybe I said something to which he wants to react. If he does, I would be happy to yield for that purpose.

Mr. DURBIN. I will wait until the Senator has completed. I would like to make a statement.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Anyway, we have here in the Des Moines Register a headline that says, "Storm Hit One in Five School Districts," and then it has reports on how much it is going to cost to fix the schools. We have another headline here that says, "At Least \$30 Million Needed to Repair Roads," as an example.

Then we have a statement that was printed in the Davenport newspaper that was written by Charlotte Eby. I am not going to quote the whole thing. I just want to speak to parts of it.

While Congress puts off consideration of the flood relief bill, it looks like the Iowa legislature will be rolling up its sleeves to help out Iowa flood victims.

It speaks about a growing sense that the Iowa legislature has to step in.

The delay of a Federal response by Congress could also push back the State response, a development that left Iowans angry.

It quotes the minority leader of the Iowa senate, Ron Wieck, Republican of Sioux City, said action cannot wait, and if that means a special session, he is for it. It doesn't quote him, but it says he is appalled that Congress will go home for the summer recess without passing a Federal flood relief package when floods left people in the Midwest homeless.

Then the last paragraph is not anybody's quote except the author's, Charlotte Eby:

Maybe the U.S. Senate majority leader Harry Reid and House speaker Nancy Pelosi ought to walk the streets of Cedar Rapids. They would think twice about heading home for their August recess without lending a helping hand.

Then I have a quote from Congressman KING, who went to Cedar Rapids, I think, as recently as Monday of this week. He says:

This is Katrina. I have walked into and out of those buildings (in New Orleans) and I tell you, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

He means telling the difference between the destruction that went on in New Orleans in the 2005 hurricane and what happened in Cedar Rapids in June when it was hit by a 500-year flood.

I do applaud Senator OBAMA because he was in Cedar Rapids yesterday campaigning, and he was also very attentive to the problems of Cedar Rapids in his town meeting. He said he came there and wanted to listen. I have not heard reports on what questions he received, what complaints he received. He may have been talking just to a friendly audience—I don't know. But he did say that he was there to listen, and I hope after he has listened to the situation in Cedar Rapids that he will

tell friends in the Congress of the United States that we need to act quickly. I hope he would say we should have acted this week—which action now, of course, is impossible because we are breaking for our summer break.

I am here once again to discuss the plight of my fellow Iowans and many others throughout the Midwest following a series of deadly tornadoes, storms, and floods. It is a multiple disaster, tornadoes and floods, and not just floods. Iowa has 99 counties. Of those, 80 counties have been designated as a disaster area by FEMA.

When looking at a map of Iowa, it is much easier to count the few counties that are not disaster areas than the vast majority that are disaster areas. Every weekend except for this past weekend since we were in session, I have been back in Iowa to meet with people affected by the storm and to see the devastation for myself. As I noted last week, estimates of damage are in the billions of dollars and are climbing every day.

I thought nothing could match my frustration at seeing so many Iowans in such great need, but the fact that we have not been able to act upon both the appropriations bill, as well as this tax bill, has frustrated me. It seems because we do not see the storm on television all the time that there is an apparent lack of desire to help the Midwest recover from these deadly tornadoes, storms, and floods, quite contrary to the quick action that Congress took after Katrina.

Before I go further, I want to display a few pictures of the flooding. The first will show one of many railroad bridges that was severely damaged. Businesses such as the one in this picture rely on this railroad track, this bridge, to receive their inputs and move their goods. Throughout Iowa there are similar bridges that are damaged. Iowa railroads play a vital part in moving our agricultural products and goods, to do it efficiently, and obviously in a more energy-efficient way. This infrastructure is important for Iowa's interstate commerce and international trade.

I have another picture that shows the museum of art at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. This is the museum of art. I believe I have heard from the university officials that this building is going to have to be torn down.

The next picture shows flooding along the Iowa River. You can see the tops of buildings. These are homes and businesses of people who just want their lives back. They are not asking for anything extraordinary or excessive, but they are in need of help to recover and rebuild. They are, in a sense, asking for the same help that New Orleans got after Katrina.

I would like to use the phrase "so that they can get things back to normal." However, it is very difficult to use that phrase. It will take years before Iowa recovers, and it will not be the same, although we will still be a very strong State.

I can share, for example, the story of my hometown of New Hartford, a community of 670 just west of Waterloo, IA. An F5 tornado ripped through this area, destroying a whole section of town. The floods then came and inundated the town. Out of 270 homes in New Hartford, IA, 240 had damage or were destroyed. Businesses were also harshly affected. Many of them are trying to decide if they want to stay in business or if they can afford to stay in business. Several have already decided not to reopen.

The town I lived around all my life as a farm boy—and still as a farmer—will never be back to normal. It won't ever be the same. I think we will have a thriving community but, quite frankly, it won't be the same.

The next chart shows you a picture of downtown Cedar Rapids. I am talking about a 500-year flood. The previous flood record was about 19 feet. Levees could take up to 22 feet. But I think this flood got as high as 31 feet and has been referred to as a 500-year flood.

As you look at this picture, think of all the homes and businesses that are severely damaged and destroyed. Downtown Cedar Rapids is not going to be the same. Since Cedar Rapids and other places in Iowa are not popular as vacation spots as are other cities, you probably haven't seen or heard much of the devastation except for the week of television when it was actually underwater. I can assure everyone that the people of Iowa and the Midwest deserve the same consideration that was given to the people of New York after 9/11 and the people of the gulf coast after the hurricanes of 2005.

Last week I touched on how the response to the Midwest disasters has been different from the response to other disasters. I would like to elaborate on that point. These are some of the same points I made last night, but I only took about 2 minutes to make these points.

On August 29, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the gulf coast, causing widespread devastation. The Congress was in recess at the time; however, the Republican Congress and the Senate Finance Committee sprang into action immediately at the staff level, even before we got back the day after Labor Day. We immediately started working with the Governors of the affected States and set out goals that we hoped to accomplish when we finally came back into session.

On September 28, 2005, less than a month—

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is speaking under a 10-minute limit.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask unanimous consent to continue my speech for as much time as I might consume.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. I would like to respond when the Senator is finished. Can he give some indication when he might finish?

Mr. GRASSLEY. Yes. About 7 or 8 minutes, I think.

Mr. DURBIN. I have no objection.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered. The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

Mr. GRASSLEY. On September 28, less than a month after Hurricane Katrina, I chaired a hearing entitled, "Hurricane Katrina: Community Rebuilding Needs and Effectiveness of Past Proposals." Governor Blanco of Louisiana, Governor Barbour of Mississippi, and Governor Riley of Alabama all participated.

On October 6, 2005, I chaired another hearing titled "The Future of the Gulf Coast Using Tax Policy to Help Rebuild Businesses and Communities and Support Families." Treasury Secretary Snow testified at that hearing.

Congress also passed tax legislation very quickly. The Katrina Emergency Relief Act of 2005 was signed by the President on September 23, 2005. This unoffset package cost more than \$6 billion. That package was followed up by the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005, which was signed by President Bush in December of 2005. This unoffset package was scored to cost around \$8.6 billion. Neither of these packages were subject to a rollcall vote in the Senate, but both were passed by unanimous consent.

I want to make it clear that we did the right thing by setting aside our planned agenda to help the people affected by hurricanes as quickly as we could. Some of the people still living on the gulf coast still need our help, and we should be helping them, and some of these tax provisions in what we call the extenders package continue some of that help. Passing these bills without offsets was also the right thing to do. As any of my staffers can tell you, I am very careful with the money. However, when people are suffering from a massive natural disaster, it is no time to be a cheapskate.

I am also very frustrated by the desire of some House Democrats to offset this tax relief package for Iowans and other Midwesterners because that is a double standard. We did not demand offsets when we were trying to help New Orleans. I am not asking for anything more than the same consideration that was given to the victims of other major disasters.

I have learned lessons from previous tax disaster packages. We learned we need to tailor the relief so more is targeted specifically for those who suffered damages and really need the assistance. Therefore, the package I introduced, that I tried to get unanimous consent on last night, called the Midwestern Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2008, provides targeted assistance to families and businesses in 10 States throughout the central United States to help those who suffered damage from these deadly storms and floods, to help them rebuild their lives.

The estimated cost of the bill is less than \$4 billion. We need to be prudent

with our Federal money, and as I stated, my tax package is targeted to those who suffered loss and is a reasonable cost to help these victims of the storms and floods in the 10 States that were affected. From that standpoint, that is something we have learned in the last 3 years from the package that was passed after Katrina.

There were people who took advantage of some provisions who were not harmed by the natural disaster, so we have tailored this bill so that only people who were harmed by the flood situation are the ones we will help. We had Senators HARKIN, BOND, MCCASKILL, COLEMAN, KLOBUCHAR, DURBIN, OBAMA, ROBERTS, BROWNBACK, LUGAR, and BAYH all as original cosponsors of this bill. In the House, the Iowa Congressional Delegation introduced a companion bill, and the list of the original cosponsors to this bill shows this is a very bipartisan package. We all recognize the need for targeted relief for the Midwest. The problem seems to be the ability to get the bill up in a timely fashion like we did in the case of New Orleans. I have been hearing that the Democratic leadership in the House is insisting that the package be offset, which is completely different than how we responded to disasters in the past when we didn't worry about offsets. Normally when we have emergencies, they are emergencies; you get the bill passed to help the people who need it.

Just yesterday the Senate voted against cloture on an extenders package put forward by Senate Democrats. It purported to include disaster relief. I am taken aback that the Senate Democrats would politicize the suffering of so many people just to try to get an extenders bill passed. The disaster relief in that bill was watered down. It provided substantially less assistance for Iowa and the other States in the central portion of the United States.

The Senator from Illinois is here, and I hope he hears that because I want to emphasize that that bill is quite a bit different and doesn't do as much good. It is not targeted. It is not helping people who need to be helped right now.

Its authors were apparently motivated by the twin misconceptions that the Midwestern disasters are not as severe as they really are and that we should undertake generic tax relief at the expense of the Midwest.

When I say the proponents of the Democratic extender package think the disaster is not as severe as they are, I say that noting that their package provided less assistance to the Midwest than my bipartisan tax-targeted disaster tax bill did provide.

The Democratic disaster package also had a higher revenue score than my package. I told you we tried to scale this back so we did not make the same mistakes we did in the case of Katrina, where a lot of people who did not get hurt by the disaster were able to take advantage of it—not our intention. But because we probably hastened it through to get help to Katrina victims, some people took advantage of it.

We tailored this so only people who have a disaster can benefit from it. It had a higher revenue score, as I said, than the Democratic alternative. They included the whole country instead of disasters that have not occurred. I am not arguing that we should look at putting generic assistance into the Tax Code to assist States when Federal disasters are declared the future. It seems to me that is a worthy thing for us to be discussing.

However, I do not think it is right to slow down the help for the Midwest because you want a broader national policy. People in the Midwest and Iowa are suffering now and have been for almost 2 months. They have experienced a severe event that was well above the 500-year flood level. This is an extraordinary disaster. We need the help right now.

The proper time to make a thorough review of how we generally respond to disasters should not come at the expense of a specific massive natural disaster that has occurred and the people need immediate assistance. The author of the disaster package put forward in the Democrat's extender bill may have meant well, but I cannot help but feel that Iowa and the Midwest would be getting the short end of the stick.

Their disaster package also included a provision that only benefitted New York, at a cost of more than \$1 billion. This is the second-largest provision in that disaster relief package, when people are literally trying to rebuild their homes, their businesses, and lives in the Midwest. It is simply insulting and disgraceful to use the misery of others to play politics and gamesmanship at a time when we should be able to put politics aside, as we did in September 2005, to help people going through extraordinarily difficult times.

However, there are apparently some who, because we do not see this on television or because they have other agendas, want to take advantage to get more. At the same time, I am trying to get help for my constituents.

The correct question to put is simply: How can I help?

The best course of action would be for the House and Senate to pass the Midwestern Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2008 and do it as we did in September 2005; do it by unanimous consent.

We can discuss general disaster response as well, but right now the people of Iowa are suffering and the Midwest is suffering as well. We have a moral obligation to help them as we helped the people and citizens of New York after 9/11 and the gulf coast when they needed help.

If anyone honestly believes Iowans do not deserve our help, then please come down to the floor, state your views, talk about it. I will encourage anyone who has doubts about the severity of this disaster to do like Senator OBAMA did yesterday, come to Iowa and I will be glad to take you around when you can come.

I am ready to yield the floor, but I had previously made a statement that

I was going to make a unanimous consent request on the immigration bill. I am not going to do that.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The assistant majority leader is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, when Senator GRASSLEY comes to the floor and speaks of the Midwestern need, he speaks of an issue of which I have intimate personal knowledge. In 1993, it was my district, my congressional district, inundated by these floods.

I spent countless hours and days working with the brave volunteers and the National Guard and others to try to save buildings and homes and farms, filling sandbags and doing everything we could to fight off the flooding of the Illinois River and the Mississippi River.

This flood, which was not supposed to occur 15 years later, matched the intensity of the 1993 flood, in some places it overwhelmed the intensity in others, particularly in the State of Iowa. The scenes Senator GRASSLEY has depicted on the floor and have been described to me by Senator HARKIN are absolutely heartbreaking.

Cedar Rapids and so many other communities were devastated. I wish to make a point for the RECORD. It is this: In the 26 years I have served in the House and the Senate, I have never—repeat never—voted against emergency disaster relief for any part of our country.

I have felt that when that occurs, we need to come together as an American family and help others, even if it did not affect my State of Illinois. Time and again, I have voted for that disaster relief, believing the day might come when I would need it for the people I represented. I sincerely believe that. I believe that what Senator GRASSLEY has offered, in terms of additional assistance for Iowa, and perhaps even for my State, in the style that was offered to Katrina victims may be a good idea. I have not had a chance to study it. But I am inclined to support it.

I believe it could be a valuable addition to the assistance which we provided.

I wish to make it clear from the outset that what I am about to say does not reflect the fact that I could end up cosponsoring the bill offered by Senator GRASSLEY and work and vote for it and probably will before it is all over.

But I cannot understand what happened here last night. The Senate adjourned. We passed the adjournment resolution. Virtually everyone had gone. The floor was empty but for Senator GRASSLEY, myself and maybe one other Member and the Presiding Officer.

Then, at 10 o'clock at night, Senator GRASSLEY came on the floor and made a unanimous consent request for this assistance for Iowa. Now, he is the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee. I do not serve on that com-

mittee. What he is asking for would be a measure that would be considered by his committee. I looked around for Senator BAUCUS, the chairman of the committee who works with Senator GRASSLEY. He had left for the evening, as most other Members had.

To think that at that moment in time, with virtually no one in the Senate, after the adjournment resolution had been passed, when the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee was not on the floor, the Senator came and made his request.

Now, any Senator can make any request at any time. But it was not made at a moment in time where one might expect success. This is a matter that should have been brought up weeks ago, weeks ago by the Senator from Iowa, and so many others, in the Senate Finance Committee, resolved and brought to the floor.

But it was not until the Chamber was empty late at night that it was brought up. I spoke on behalf of Senator BAUCUS and I objected. I did because it concerned me that the day before, we had a measure on the floor to not only help Iowa, which truly needs help, but to help Illinois, to help all the States that have encountered disasters during the course of this last year.

Senator GRASSLEY's request relates primarily to the Midwestern area, which I am part of, and to disasters which occurred after May 20. There are many States that have faced many disasters which would not be helped by Senator GRASSLEY's bill. He made that conscious choice. He wanted to help his own State and, of course, he would. I would want to help my State first too.

But in the scheme of things, do we not owe an obligation to other States that have faced disasters to try to treat them fairly as well? How can some Senators on the Republican side come and vote against disaster relief on Wednesday or Thursday, and then come the next day and say: I want my own version of the bill—late at night—let's make sure we get it passed.

The Senate does not work that way and it should not. We should be conscious of the disasters across the United States and be evenhanded. Now, the Senator raised my name in the debate this morning, referring to me as the majority whip. I had not planned on being on the Senate floor. But my staff said: The Senator from Iowa is making reference to you. I came to the floor. I wanted to make sure the RECORD is complete and at least reflects my own views of what happened last night and what should happen moving forward.

The Senator from Iowa said this morning, and I wish to quote what he said because I think it is very important. The Senator from Iowa, in describing why he voted against S. 3335, which includes the energy tax extenders, \$8 billion for the highway trust fund so 400,000 jobs across America would not be lost; money to protect families from the alternative minimum

tax penalties; the Wellstone Mental Health Parity Bill; and, disaster assistance for the State of Iowa, the Senator voted against that.

This morning here is how he explained it:

We, the minority, want to stay on the No. 1 problem affecting this country and, that is, the high cost of gasoline and the energy crisis that is facing the Nation.

That is how he explained his vote against the measure. Yet he comes to the floor and asks the Senate to move off that energy matter so his bill can pass. The Senator cannot have it both ways. You cannot have it both ways, when we bring a bill to the floor to help the State of Iowa and other disaster-stricken States and you vote against it saying, "I do not want to move off the Energy bill," and then, while we are still on the Energy bill, make a unanimous consent to move off it to help your State.

If we are going to be fair to all the States that have faced disasters, then we should pass this bill. I am going to give you a chance to help Iowa now.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 6049

I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 767, H.R. 6049, the Renewable Energy Job Creation Act of 2008, that the amendment at the desk, the text of which is S. 3335, be considered and agreed to; the bill, as amended, be read a third time, passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; that any statements be printed in the RECORD.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. GRASSLEY. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois has the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. I yield to Senator GRASSLEY for the purpose of his explaining his objection so the Senator's objection is in the RECORD. But do I not want to surrender the floor. Is that possible?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, yes, I will take that opportunity. I hope I get to have an opportunity to offer a unanimous consent request as well for our side of the aisle, if you want to be completely fair. In the last few weeks in this body, we have not necessarily been fair.

So let me take advantage of the majority whip's invitation to respond. First of all, he knows, because he is in the leadership, that I gave the majority party information, at least 48 hours ago, and maybe 72 hours ago, that this week I was going to seek a unanimous consent request, and all day yesterday we were denied that opportunity, even at the point before adjournment and my speaking to Leader REID about when can I do my unanimous consent request.

You know what I was told? After the adjournment resolution. So do not say

I did not make an attempt to do it and do not say you did not know about it. If you wanted to cooperate with us, we could have had that cooperation. But there does not seem to be that sort of comity in the Senate anymore.

Another point you made was that I had a chance to work for a tax relief package for flood victims. The bill you voted for and you asked unanimous consent on did less for your constituents than the legislation we had been working on for 2 weeks.

Then, he brings up the point about not working through committee. Well, most of the work on this bill has been so we can get a consensus package, working with even Chairman RANGEL's staff, so it is not only bipartisan but bicameral, so we can put together something and get it done very quickly in the same consensus manner that we were able to help the victims of New Orleans.

Then, the other reason: Why would the Senator from Illinois cosponsor our bill if it was not the right bill for his State and for the Midwest and for this disaster?

We have always tried to do things as quickly as can be done when people hurt. That is why when we got back after Katrina—on Tuesday or Wednesday—we had \$10 billion that we were going to give to New Orleans. Before the end of the week was up, it was \$60 billion, in 2005.

Now, do you think the committee had an opportunity to work its will on that? No. They were responding to need. Don't you think your constituents hurt across from Burlington? They may be still underwater. I do not know. A couple weeks ago, they were when I was talking on the radio station. In Burlington you had constituents who still had just the roofs of houses showing. Don't you think they need help right now?

So I think, first of all, procedurally, either the majority whip does not know what is going on when I notify his cloakroom that I am going to offer it or else he does not care or he wants to mislead.

The second thing is, he is not voting for the bills and pushing the bills that will help his constituents the most, and we still do not have the relief.

So that is my response to the Senator from Illinois.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I would just say to the Senator from Iowa, I was not part of his conversation with the majority leader as to when he was going to offer his unanimous consent request. He offered it after the chairman of the Finance Committee had left and virtually all the members had left.

Whether he had an opportunity to do that before, I do not know. He did not make a request of me. I was not aware of it. But he certainly met with Senator BAUCUS during the course of this week and had ample opportunity to raise this issue. It is something that

should have been resolved between the two of them before Senator BAUCUS left. I think he would understand, as I do, that is a problem for Senator BAUCUS to be gone and to make a unanimous consent request.

One thing the Senator from Iowa did not say was why he objected to this bill. Again, he voted against it. Now he objected again—this bill that does contain assistance for my State and his State because of the recent flood disaster. The simple reason is, he disagrees with many of the other provisions of this bill and decided he would vote against it. That is his right as a Senator.

I will tell him again, I may find his bill that he is offering today to be the right bill for my State and for his State as well and support him. Even if his unanimous consent request prevailed today, the House is gone. We will be gone in just a matter of hours. Nothing is going to happen to his request until we return in September.

Maybe after the August break, and a little bit of time and reflection, we can come back and find what we need; that is, a bipartisan approach to helping a lot of innocent victims of this flooding in the Midwest and victims of other disasters across the United States.

As much as I feel for my own home State and his State of Iowa, there are many other disaster victims who need a helping hand as well. I think we ought to consider all of them when we return.

So at this point, Mr. President, I am going to yield the floor and say to the Senator from Iowa, we have worked closely on things before. But when he raised my name on the Senate floor this morning, when I was not present, I felt I had to come down and explain what happened last night and the situation we find ourselves in today.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2291

Mr. President, I have one unanimous consent request to ask, which I do not think has an objection.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 869, S. 2291, the Plain Language in Government Communications Act; that an Akaka substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator BENNETT, I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The senior Senator from Iowa is recognized.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3322

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, before the Senator from Illinois leaves the floor, I want to ask unanimous consent to bring up a bill to which he is probably going to object. But I want him to know that people on this side of the aisle want to move things along.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of S. 3322, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the Grassley amendment at the desk be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, and the bill be held at the desk pending further House action.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, this is the same request that was made last night.

On behalf of Senator BAUCUS, the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, thank you very much.

ENERGY

Mr. President, I rise this morning to talk about an issue we have talked a lot about in the Senate for weeks and now months, literally, and we have not reached a resolution on it. It is the question of energy and gasoline and what has been happening to our economy, what has been happening to our families.

There is plenty of blame to go around. I am not here to do that today. But I do think that anything we talk about—and certainly anything we legislate on—has to pass two tests. One test is, will it provide short-term relief to families or short-term help to the economy? And, will it help long term? If it does not pass the short-term and/or the long-term test, we should not be doing it. That is kind of the frame of what I want to use to talk about some of the issues I am going to raise this morning.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a unanimous consent request?

Mr. CASEY. Sure.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I apologize for interrupting the Senator.

I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized following the Senator's remarks for 20 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from North Dakota for reminding me what I promised I would do.

Mr. President, I want to talk about this issue in terms of short term and long term because one thing that has been missing from this debate, frankly, on both sides, is sometimes not nearly enough honesty—a lot of charges and countercharges, a lot of finger pointing, and not enough progress. I think for one party or the other in the Senate to blame the other is not productive, nor is it accurate.

So let's talk about short term and long term. There are some things we

can do short term to help this problem. No one here has a magic wand to say if we take this action, gas prices are going to go down in the next couple of weeks. Anyone who says that is probably not telling the truth—maybe not even over the course of a couple of months. But there are some things we should try to help in the short term before we abandon that and say all we can do is look to the long term, which we all know is renewable energy and all of these strategies. But let's talk about the short term.

I think yesterday a number of Senators—I think the total is 36; I will stand corrected if I am wrong about that—at least 35 or 36 Senators wrote to the President of the United States. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the July 31 letter to the President regarding the Strategic Petroleum Reserve be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
Washington, DC, July 31, 2008.

The PRESIDENT,
The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: We are writing today to urge you to use your emergency authority to immediately release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Virtually no other action you could take would have as positive or as immediate an impact at the pump, lowering fuel prices for American consumers and businesses. Unlike other proposals put forward in recent days that would take 8 to 10 years to affect the price of gasoline, an announcement of plans to release oil from the Reserve could cause a decline in oil prices within hours. A similar announcement made by your father, President George H. W. Bush, in 1991 led oil prices to decline within a day of the announcement, even though the actual release of oil did not occur for two weeks.

For the past two months, U.S. gasoline prices have topped \$4.00 per gallon—at least \$1 more than just a year ago. Diesel fuel has been even more expensive, now averaging \$4.60 a gallon. This has had a devastating effect on American families and businesses. Although gasoline prices have risen 165 percent since you have taken office, average gross income has increased only approximately 24 percent. High transportation costs are adding to higher prices in our stores and supermarkets, too.

Fuel prices have risen in direct response to rising crude oil prices. The 40-percent increase in oil prices since the beginning of the year is unprecedented, given that there have been no unusual world supply disruptions. Instead, growing worldwide demand, flat production, and uncontrolled market speculation have put upward pressure on oil prices. This crisis constitutes a severe energy supply interruption. It requires an immediate response, and you hold it in your power to authorize a release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve that will immediately supplement our crude oil supply and break the cycle of spiraling speculation.

The Government Accountability Office recommended in a hearing before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources on February 26, 2008, that the Department of Energy hold 10 percent of its Strategic Petroleum Reserve inventory in heavy crude oil. The lack of heavy, sour crude oil in the

Reserve inventory poses a problem for refiners that use this kind of oil, refiners upon whom we would rely in the case of an emergency supply disruption. The Department has acknowledged the benefit of holding heavier crude oil in its inventory and stated its intent to acquire heavy crude oil as it expands its inventory capacity.

We ask that you take immediate action to begin to implement this modernization of the Reserve by releasing 70 million barrels of light, sweet crude oil, about 10 percent of the current Reserve inventory.

This would have an immediate effect on oil and gasoline prices, unlike proposals that would open new federal land and offshore areas for drilling, which would not add oil to the market for many years.

At an appropriate time in the future, the Reserve should be replenished with lower-grade, heavy crude oil, in accordance with the GAO's recommendation. Market conditions are favorable for this exchange of light for heavy crude, as the current high price differential between these two crude types would allow the Department to generate considerable revenue.

Given the benefits this step offers for the mission of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and the relief it would provide to Americans suffering from record high fuel costs, we urge you to direct the Department of Energy to release light, sweet crude oil from the reserve to help Americans at the pump now.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Dick Durbin, Harry Reid, Bill Nelson,
John Kerry, Amy Klobuchar, Kent
Conrad, Debbie Stabenow, Dianne Feinstein,
Herb Kohl, Barbara Boxer,
Sherrod Brown, _____.

Mr. CASEY. I won't read the whole letter, and I won't read all the signatures. But here is how the letter starts. The first line of the letter reads:

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing today—

Meaning yesterday—

to urge you to use your emergency authority to immediately release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

It goes on later in that paragraph to say:

A similar announcement made by your father, President George H.W. Bush, in 1991 led oil prices to decline within a day of the announcement, even though the actual release of oil did not occur for two weeks.

So when that happened in 1991, oil prices went down very rapidly. The same happened with this President Bush in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. So what we ask is that the President—he does not need Congress; he does not need to get a consensus in Washington—the President has the authority today to release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

So the letter, toward the end, says:

We ask that you take immediate action to begin to implement this modernization of the Reserve by releasing 70 million barrels of light, sweet crude oil, about 10 percent of the current Reserve inventory.

So I am quoting in part from the letter, but the point is, the President of the United States today—today—has all the power and the authority to take that action. Will it be a magic wand? No. Will it immediately lower prices? Probably not. But it has the potential

because of the precedents of what happened before—the recent history on this—to bring down prices. So that is something that is short term that the President could do right now. I hope he would do that.

But let's talk about long term. One thing we all agree upon, both sides of the aisle, we can fight and we can point fingers and we can have arguments and debates—and it is OK to debate—but one thing we all agree on, no matter what party we are in—and this is something the American people understand in their gut; they get this and they understand this—we have to take steps now that we should have taken 10 years ago or maybe 20 or 25 years ago that we did not take to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and to get to this question of renewables.

We had that chance a couple of times in the last 18 months. We had that chance just a few days ago, but it was blocked. A lot of people in this body voted for it. We did not get enough votes, but here is what was blocked.

Let me run through a quick list because sometimes when these votes occur and the vote is announced we forget what was voted on. Here is what was blocked a couple days ago: a new consumer tax credit for the purchase of plug-in electric vehicles, to move that tax credit from \$3,000 to \$5,000, plug in electric vehicles, that was blocked; a 1-year extension of a wind power tax credit, that was blocked; a 3-year extension of biomass, geothermal, and other renewable energy tax credits, that was blocked; an extension of the 30-percent investment tax credit for solar energy, that was blocked; an extension of the 10-percent investment tax credit for fuel cells, that was blocked; a 5-year extension of the tax deduction for energy-efficient commercial buildings—we know we have to do that—that was blocked; a 3-year extension of the tax credit for energy-efficient appliances, that was blocked.

So on issue after issue that gets to this question of reducing our dependence on foreign oil, getting off of oil generally—not just foreign oil but getting off of the dependence on oil—working on all of those renewable energy strategies that everybody in the country knows we have to do, they were blocked a couple days ago, and we should remind people who are paying attention to this issue that actually happened.

We have a debate currently about speculation. I am not going to spend a lot of time on that. It is not a magic wand. I have said that before. But it is one of the ways—probably more long term than short term, but it is one of the ways we have to provide some relief long term.

So these are strategies that, whether it is speculation, cracking down, and providing more sunlight—that is all we are asking for, is to say: If you want to make a lot of money in the market, and we have a commodity futures entity that regulates your conduct, we

want to give them the authority to provide sunlight to that transaction. That is all we are asking. That is all we are asking on speculation.

So speculation passes maybe both but at least one of the short-term/long-term tests—one of that two-part test. This letter to the President on the Strategic Petroleum Reserve—that certainly passes the short-term test that we can get some short-term help. It is not all the relief we want, not a magic wand, but it can provide some help.

So what else do we need to talk about?

We have been talking and talking a lot about drilling. Let's put some facts on the table. Some of these facts have not been on the table. It is important to do that. I know there are a lot of people out there saying: If we could just drill, we could have some relief provided. I would argue—and I think there is a lot of evidence to show this—that the drilling argument put forth by the other side does not pass the short-term test and does not pass the long-term test. It does not pass either test, and we know that.

Here is what should be on the table in terms of facts. All these years since the President has been in office, the price of gasoline has gone up, and in my home State of Pennsylvania people are paying more in a year—almost \$2,800 more—for gasoline than they were when the administration started. OK. That is just a fact. We know the price of gasoline has gone up. Everyone understands that.

But while the price of gasoline was going up over the last couple years, guess what else was going up. This has not been talked about much. There has been a 361-percent increase in oil drilling. So we have increased oil drilling a lot. Some might argue we have never drilled more. There has been a 361-percent increase in oil drilling since the President came into office, and yet the price of gasoline has gone up at the same time. So this idea that oil drilling has been restricted or limited is contrary to the facts.

So how can that be? If the other side keeps talking about "drilling leading to relief," how can it be that we have had that increase, and whether you measure it by the increase in drilling or the leases, we have had a dramatic increase in the number of leases. So that is fact No. 1, a 361-percent increase in oil drilling since the administration started.

Here is another fact: Seventy-nine percent of America's recoverable oil reserves are already open for drilling. Seventy-nine percent are open—open for business right now. So there is plenty of drilling going on; in fact, it has accelerated. Yet the price of gasoline has gone up.

Regarding the 24-percent versus 3-percent argument that I and others have made, the Washington Post had a chart on Sunday, July 27, page A-8, and I have the chart right here, a chart in red. It reads very simply: The percent

of the world's oil consumed by the United States in 2007: 24.4 percent. So we are consuming more of the world's oil. It is up to 24 percent. So if you want to drill your way to that 24 percent of the world's oil—because that is what the other side is saying—then we must be, I guess, hoping to produce enough to get there. Well, we know America has only 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, so no matter what we do on drilling, even if we add to the massive increase we have had in drilling, it is not going to get us to the 24.4 percent consumption. That is why we have to get renewables.

So when people across America say we can't drill our way out of it, that is not just a nice little phrase, it is the truth. You can't get to 24.4 percent if you only have 3 percent of the reserves, no matter what you do on drilling.

Finally—and I won't spend a lot of time on this, but it is relevant to the discussion—one party involved but that hasn't checked in on the debate to give us a little help is the oil companies. Members of the House and Senate are debating and sometimes fighting, the American people are arguing about this, and all the while this debate is going on, guess who is getting our tax money—tens of billions—and guess who is also doing pretty well on their quarterly profits. Big oil. I have said it before and I will say it again. President Kennedy was right. Once in a while, we have to ask ourselves, what can we do for our country? I have to ask Mr. Big Oil: What are you doing for your country? While we are having this debate and while everyone is frustrated by gas prices—and rightfully so—what is big oil doing?

Well, here is what they are doing. ExxonMobil released their quarterly profits: in one quarter, almost \$12 billion in profits, and we are giving them tax breaks. So they get all the drilling they need, they are getting our tax money, their quarterly profit is \$11 billion, and they are not checking in. They are not saying, you know what—or we are not saying to them with legislation—we want to do it, I want to do it, but we don't have enough votes on the other side to do it. We are not saying: You know what, Mr. Big, with big oil profits, you have enough. You have enough tax breaks, you have enough places to drill. You have enough profits. You have enough. It is time for Mr. Big Oil to give a little, to help us a little as we debate this, because until they check in and until they help the American people, or until we force them to help the American people, we are going to be missing a lot of opportunities.

I will conclude with this. I think we should continue this important debate. I am happy the majority leader, who I think has shown great leadership on this issue, has continued to work in a bipartisan way and wants to have a summit, a meeting with both parties. That is important to get something done. I think we can. If we don't start

dealing with facts and start dealing with that test, what will help us short term but, more importantly, what is going to help us long term—and that is renewables—until we get to the question of renewables and until more people on the other side start voting to incentivize the creation of renewable sources of energy, we are not going to make much progress. So I think we need to focus on that test and we need to make sure we are working in a bipartisan way to try to bring some relief to American families.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized for 20 minutes.

CHINA

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I come today as a United States Senator, but also as the co-chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China. I wish to tell my colleagues that the Congress created the Congressional-Executive Commission on China in the year 2000 to monitor China's compliance with international human rights standards and to encourage the development of the rule of law there. I am proud to be a co-chairman of the Congressional Executive Commission on China. I think the role it performs is an extremely important one.

I come to the Senate floor today in that role. I also come as well to say that at a time when there is so much criticism of almost everybody in the political system—and I have done my share of differing with various people in politics—I come today to say to President Bush that I very much appreciate the actions he took this week when he met with several dissidents from China, all of whom have been imprisoned in China for exercising the fundamental human right of free speech.

The President met with the dissidents for the same reason I come to the floor of the Senate this morning. One week from today, the 2008 Summer Olympics begin. It is a great pageantry and a great celebration, in many ways. It is a celebration of athletic achievement from all around the globe. We will have many Americans representing our country and demonstrating their individual achievements on the field of sport. We will have basketball players and tennis players and gymnasts and track and field participants. They will participate in these wonderful Olympic games that occur every 4 years.

The Olympic games at this time, a week from now, will be held in the country of China. There was dispute about that and concern about China hosting the Olympics, but China convinced the International Olympic Committee that it would make significant progress in areas that reflect the ideals of the Olympics—especially human rights and human dignity. Because of the commitments it made, China was awarded the Olympic Games for 2008.

This is, it seems to me, not only an opportunity for athletes from our country and around the world to compete in sport, but it is also an opportunity, given that the Games will be held this year in China, for our country and for other countries to appeal to the Chinese government to open its system to greater human rights. It is also an opportunity to strongly urge the Chinese government at this point to address the issue of so many of its citizens—many of whom are its best and brightest citizens—sitting in dark prison cells, having been sent to prison for exercising the right of free speech.

China is an extraordinary country. You cannot understand the wonder of China without visiting it. You can't help but stand on the Great Wall of China and think about the history of this incredibly interesting country. Visiting China is an extraordinary experience. But, it is also the case that China is not an open society.

Our Congressional-Executive Commission on China has the largest database of prisoners, the most complete database of Chinese political prisoners that is accessible and searchable by the public. Why do we keep that database? So we can shine a bright light into the darkest cells of China, for those who have been imprisoned by the Chinese for exercising the right of free assembly and free speech, and to say to them: The world knows you are there. You are not forgotten.

The international community has the opportunity at this moments during these Olympics to speak up and speak out. I complimented President Bush for meeting with the dissidents this week. I think it was exactly the right thing to do. I compliment him and support him for what he said to the dissidents. He said to the dissidents that he intended to not only care about freedom and liberty, but when he traveled to China, and to talk to the Chinese about freedom and liberty.

All of the people President Bush met with this week have spent years in Chinese jails for advocating on behalf of religious freedom, human rights, freedom of speech in China. So when the President travels to China for the opening of the Olympics, it is vital, it seems to me—and I think I speak for the entire Congress—to say it is vital that the President express in the strongest terms possible to the Chinese that they need to address the human rights problems in their country that have been so deeply disturbing to the rest of the world.

As I indicated, we have the names of 807 political prisoners known or believed to be currently detained, imprisoned or under house arrest. These 807 records of Chinese people in jail are a subset of the nearly 4,500 records in the Political Prisoner Database. The rest of the records reflect release, death, or escape.

Our commission works very hard to get information out about those who are being held in some of the darkest

cells in China. We want the world to pay attention. The President of the United States committing to go to China and to talk to the Chinese leaders about these people is very important. We have sent President Bush the list of 807 prisoners now in Chinese prisons. Let me go through a few of them, because I think it is important to attach faces and names to this list of 807 people.

This man is named Hu Jia. Hu Jia is a courageous activist who was jailed last December by Chinese authorities because he was invited to speak at a European Parliament hearing. At the hearing, he made comments in his testimony that were critical of China hosting the Olympics. The result was that he was put in a Chinese prison. His wife and infant daughter—and you see his wife and daughter in this photograph—were placed under house arrest for several months. In April, Hu Jia was sentenced to 3½ years in prison for inciting subversion of state power. Let me describe the charge again: “Inciting subversion of state power.”

I recently talked to a man who testified at that same European Parliament hearing and along with Mr. Hu Jia. This man, however, is not in prison because he is not a Chinese citizen. He also just expressed himself like Hu Jia. At the request of a hearing of the European Parliament, he testified and expressed himself. He expressed criticism of China for being chosen to host the Olympics. For that, Mr. Hu Jia will spend 3½ years in a Chinese prison.

The next photograph is a photograph of Yang Chunlin. He has been repeatedly detained for helping farmers seek compensation for lost land in China. Last summer he organized a petition entitled “We Want Human Rights, Not The Olympics.” He was subsequently arrested and he was charged for inciting subversion of state power. We are told that he has suffered severe beatings, causing damage to his eyesight, all for the purpose of speaking out, exercising the right of free speech. He is a very courageous Chinese citizen who simply wants the opportunity to speak freely.

Finally, Mr. Ye Guozhu. He is pictured in this photograph alone. Three generations of his family were evicted from their Beijing home in 2003 to make way for the Olympic-related construction that occurred in Beijing. In 2004, because three generations of his family were evicted from their homes, he applied for permission to organize a protest against other alleged forced evictions in connection with preparations for the Olympics. He was arrested. He has been sentenced to 4 years in prison.

Let me describe the charge. The charge for which he is serving 4 years in a Chinese prison is “provoking and making trouble.” Because three generations of his family had been evicted from their homes to make room for the Olympics, he decided to circulate a petition to organize a protest against

other alleged forced evictions, and he is now serving 4 years in prison. We are told he has repeatedly been tortured. He finished his sentence, by the way, and was supposed to be released from prison this week. But his release has been further delayed, presumably, because the Olympics are near.

The President of the United States—and only the President—has the power to shine the brightest light in the world into the dark cells in China and say to these courageous Chinese citizens that you are not alone. This country knows about you, about your struggle, and about your efforts to secure freedom of speech and other fundamental human rights.

We have said to the Chinese Government we want progress. They made representations to the Olympic Committee, in exchange for being able to host the Olympics, that they would make progress on human rights. I have shown photographs of some very courageous Chinese citizens who now sit in Chinese prisons precisely because their human rights have been violated.

Again, I thank President Bush for meeting with the dissidents this past week. I am someone who, from time to time, doesn't agree with President Bush. I am often critical of his work. But today I commend him for meeting with the dissidents who had previously served time in prison in China. He met with them at the White House this week. It was the right thing to do. He made commitments to those dissidents that he is going to do all he can. I hope he will—when he goes to China—take that torch of liberty and freedom to President Hu in China and say that our country will not ignore these prisoners, we will not pretend they don't exist. China has a responsibility to move toward greater human rights.

So this is the moment. I hope very much that President Bush will do what he told the Chinese dissidents he will. I commend him for that, and I hope that not just in the next 7 days, when the Olympics are prepared to start, but also during the Olympics and during the President's visit, he will offer some hope and encouragement to those who now spend their time in a dark prison cell for having the temerity to try to speak the truth in China.

I strongly feel that if we miss this moment, we will have missed something very important. I support the Olympics. They are a wonderful opportunity for the world. But I strongly believe that when the Olympics are held in a country such as China, and the Government there makes certain representations about human rights not only to the Olympic Committee but also to those who will attend the Olympics, and especially the President of the United States, who will meet with President Hu, that he will bring that message of freedom, liberty, and human rights to the Chinese Government and describe our expectation and the expectation of the international community that their citizens be allowed full and genuine freedom.

Mr. President, how much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota has 6 minutes 20 seconds.

ENERGY

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I wish to make a couple comments about energy. There has been a lot of discussion all week—in fact, the last several weeks—on energy, and the reason is obvious. When you see the runup and doubling of price of gas and oil in a year, the American people are pretty apoplectic about that. They wonder what can they do to respond to it. How do I afford to fill my gas tank to go to work? The airlines wonder: How do we afford to put jet fuel in the airplanes we fly? The truckers wonder: How do I fill the saddle tanks and be able to afford it? The farmers wonder: How do I fill the fuel tanks for the harvest? This is a big hit to the American economy.

The first step is to do the obvious thing. I have a letter, for example, from the chief executive officer of an oil refining company called Tesoro. They don't produce oil; they have to buy oil like everybody else to refine it. He believes there is a dramatic amount of excess speculation in the oil market. We need to wring out the excess speculation from the commodity markets. Seventy-one percent of what is happening in the oil futures market has nothing to do with people who want oil. They don't want a can of oil, a 5-gallon can or even a quart. They want to trade paper and make money. That market is broken and has been taken over by speculators. We should set that market right and wring out the excess speculation in that market. We have testimony before the committee that doing that can reduce the price of oil and gas by 20 to 40 percent. That is step 1. We ought to do the easy things, and then a lot of other things.

My colleagues say drill. I say absolutely. Conservation is the cheapest form of energy. Saving a barrel is the same as producing a barrel. We waste a lot. Producing and drilling and conservation and efficiency. Every light switch we turn on, every thermostat, everything we do can be much more efficient and lose much less energy, no question about that. Conservation, efficiency, production—and especially a game-changing approach away from every 15 years shuffling in here like bags of wind in blue suits, talking about the plan we had 15 years ago and 15 years before that and 15 years before that.

How about finding new energy and moving toward hydrogen fuel cell vehicles? Hydrogen is everywhere. Water vapor would come out of the tailpipe. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Battery storage technology, with substantial research, and moving to electric cars. How about doing all these things? Solar, wind, biomass, geothermal—we have so many opportunities. We can round up all the money we spend on all of it and research a different energy fu-

ture, which equals what we spend in the war in Iraq in 40 hours. We ought to do everything and do it well; but we ought to decide that if we are addicted—and President Bush says we are—what do you do with an addict? Do you say I will quit tomorrow and pass the bottle tonight? That is not what you do. You decide you are going to have something that is game changing. You are going to go to a different kind of energy future.

I wish to make a final point that is very important. I support increased production, all those things. But my colleagues in the Senate have blocked—some of them in the minority—through eight votes, our determination to provide tax incentives for renewable energy. Renewable energy is so important, and we put into place permanent, robust tax incentives in 1916 to say that if you look for oil and gas, God bless you, we need it. If you find it, you will get tax incentives. We have done that for almost a century. Do you know what we did for people who tried to go find and produce wind, solar, and other renewable forms? We put into place tax incentives in 1992—short term, kind of shallow—and we extended them five times, and we let them expire three times. Start, stop, stutter step. The fact is, we shut off all the investment every time they stop. They are set to expire at the end of the year. The minority has blocked, eight times, the extension of the tax incentives so we can move toward a different energy future.

If we don't understand that when 65 percent of your oil comes from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Venezuela and outside our country and that makes America vulnerable—if we don't understand that, we ought to go back to bed; you don't need to wake up. It has been pretty disconcerting to see people thumb their suspenders and stick out their stomachs and say we need to drill another hole someplace. We suck 85 million barrels of oil a day out of this planet, and 21 million barrels of that are destined for this country. We use one-fourth of every drop of oil pulled out of this planet every day, and almost 65 percent of it comes from outside our country. If you don't understand the vulnerability of that, then you don't have the capability to understand very much, in my judgment.

We need a robust, aggressive, new energy future. It must include virtually everything, but at its root and at its foundation, it must have a game-changing device that says that 10 years from now we are going to have a different energy mix, a different construct.

Yesterday, I said John F. Kennedy didn't hang around in the early sixties and say: I am thinking of sending a person to the Moon or I am going to try to send a person to the Moon or I hope we can send a person to the Moon. That is not what he said. He said that by the end of the decade, we are going to have a person walking on the Moon.

How about saying that in this country now on energy?

By the end of the next 10 years, we will have substantially changed this country's energy mix, and we are going to make the investments necessary to do it, so we are not shuffling around here 10 years from now with the same tired arguments I call "yesterday forever." How about something that does advance this country's long-term interest in energy? Let's do everything we can at this point. In the meantime, let's set a goal and meet the goal as a country that makes us less dependent on foreign oil and move to a different kind of energy future.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The senior Senator from Oregon is recognized.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 20 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am heading home for town meetings this weekend. There is no question that the dominant subject is going to be all the economic hurt we are certainly seeing in Oregon and across the country. People are concerned about their gas bills and their food bills and medical bills.

Yesterday, Senator GRASSLEY and I, in an effort to look at a fresh approach to holding down gas bills, released what we call a discussion draft, in an effort to solicit ideas and input from people who have expertise on this subject, about how we might change the tax laws so as to not encourage speculation in the oil business.

The current Tax Code gives speculators tax incentives to bid up the price of oil. Essentially, the current tax law distorts our markets. It favors one set of buyers and sellers over another. Senator GRASSLEY and I are going to be seeking ideas and suggestions over the month-long August recess in the hope that in the fall, when the Senate reconvenes, Democrats and Republicans can come together on a bipartisan basis and come up with more sensible tax policies, so we don't have a tax system that, in effect, creates incentives to drive up the price of gasoline.

We have put out this proposal, and it is on my Web site. Again, we call it a discussion draft. It is, in fact, just that—a way to gather ideas and input and make sure people have a chance to be heard.

On another economic hot button issue that is burning a hole in the pockets of our people, I wish to spend a few minutes talking about health care. One of the reasons health care is so expensive is that we pay for so much inefficiency in our health care system. This year, we are going to spend about \$2.3 trillion on American health care. Dr. Peter Orszag, the head of the CBO, estimates that about \$700 billion of that \$2.3 trillion is essentially spent on health care of little or no value. So we

have to find ways to root out some of this inefficient health care spending if we are going to hold the costs down.

Yesterday, a very remarkable hearing was held in the Senate Finance Committee on which I serve. Senator BAUCUS, chairman of the committee, to his credit, made it clear that he is going to dig into these big issues. It is clear, once again, that the Tax Code, as it relates to health care, is clearly driving up the cost for American families and for our people. In effect, the Tax Code encourages inefficient expenditures in American health. We have writeoffs for employers. We have breaks for individuals but they are not shared by all. The \$250 billion that is spent through these tax rules disproportionately goes to the most affluent in our society, rather than the people who need it the most.

If you live, for example, in a small town in Ohio or a small town in Oregon, here is the way it works with the Tax Code: If you are well-off and you have a fancy health care plan, you can tuck a whole lot of your compensation into that health plan tax-free. So in a town in Ohio or Oregon, if you are going to buy a pair of designer eyeglasses or get a designer smile, you can write off the cost of those Cadillac benefits. But if you are somebody in a small Oregon town or in Ohio who has no health care, you don't get those writeoffs.

It is unfair. It encourages inefficiency because the typical worker is in the dark about their health care. Even if they have a plan, most of the time they don't have the choice. Most individuals don't have a chance to hold down their health care costs the way we do as Members of Congress. As Members of Congress, we get to choose between a host of private plans. If you are lucky enough to have some employer coverage in our country, you hardly ever have a choice, No. 1, and, No. 2, if your money is being spent inefficiently, there isn't anything you can do about it as an individual. In fact, most people don't even realize the reason their take-home pay doesn't go up is because all of their potential increase in take-home pay when they are more productive seems to go to health care. In fact, Dr. Orszag of the Congressional Budget Office has said there is so much inefficiency in the health care system that nothing much is going to change until people realize they are losing out on take-home pay because their take-home pay goes to pay for their health care.

What we have said as a group in the Senate—eight Democratic Senators and eight Republican Senators—is we want to change this system that is so profoundly unfair to working people and also rewards inefficiency. What we have proposed in our legislation—the Healthy Americans Act—is to take away the Federal tax subsidies for the Cadillac health care plans and use that money instead so every family in America can get a progressive deduc-

tion of \$15,000 annually to buy their health care.

It is our view that this amounts to a trifecta. Health care would be fairer because we would have taken away those Cadillac tax breaks and given them to the middle-class folks who are having difficulty affording their health care. It would be more efficient because people would have choices of their private health coverage and have new incentives to make purchases carefully. And there would be a progressive way to finance extending coverage for more of our people.

I have watched with great interest the effort in Pennsylvania where wonderful people, such as Governor Rendell and committed State legislators, have been trying to expand coverage. One of the reasons it is hard to do at the State level is there is no progressive way to finance some of the extra coverage for people who are uninsured or underinsured.

We have found that progressive financing in the Healthy Americans Act because we take away the tax breaks for those Cadillac plans used for designer eyeglasses or new smiles, or whatever, and we move that money to hard working families in Oregon and Pennsylvania and Ohio for expanded coverage.

Our approach, as was noted by the head of the Joint Committee on Taxation, would give 80 percent of the American people a tax cut. A typical family spends about \$12,000 buying their private health insurance, if they can afford it. We would give a tax cut to 80 percent of the American people with our approach.

The Senator from Pennsylvania and I sat in on a very good meeting yesterday describing some of the questions that accompany making change on big economic issues. People want to know how do you make sure it is not so confusing and your family doesn't get lost in red tape. For example, in health care, people want to know: If I like what I have, can I keep it? I like the idea of looking at alternatives, but if I have a plan and I like it and my employer wants to continue to offer it, can I do it?

What we said in the Healthy Americans Act, sponsored by 16 of us in the Senate, was absolutely. If you want to keep what you have and your employer wants to keep offering it, so be it. But if your employer wants more choices and if you as a worker want more choices, we also provide that kind of opportunity. That is why I have said our proposal operates very much like what all of us—the Senator from Pennsylvania, the Senator from Ohio, and myself—have in the Congress. There is a period of time when we get to choose between the various private insurance policies. The insurers cannot cream skim. They cannot cherry pick and take only healthy people and send everybody who has a health problem somewhere else. We do that in the Healthy Americans Act. With our ap-

proach, we can get a lot more for our health care dollar. A lot of people in this country, say if they work for a small employer where they do not have much bargaining power or they are out on their own, cannot get that today.

We set this up so it looks, in terms of its operations, pretty much like the way it works for us as Members of Congress in terms of making our private choices. There are places you can call for help in choosing a plan. And giving everyone these kinds of private choices injects competition and new opportunities to hold down costs into the system.

The issue we talked about yesterday in the Senate Finance Committee, the Federal tax rules, I would guess there is probably not 1 out of 100 people in the United States who knows much about this. But this is one of the biggest programs run by the Federal Government. It comes to about \$250 billion a year. And to have the money go out the door in a way that so wildly favors the most fortunate and encourages inefficiency at the same time strikes me as bizarre.

Yesterday, under the leadership of Chairman BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY, conversation was started about a topic that I think is essential to this issue of fixing American health care. If we do it right, there is the opportunity for expanding coverage in a progressive way so that the next time, for example, the Pennsylvania legislature wrestles with this issue—this issue that Governor Rendell and Pennsylvania legislators tackled this last year and could not pass legislation on—they would be able to say some changes were made in Federal policy so as to fund in a progressive way some of the changes that need to be made.

There is no question this needs to be done in a careful and deliberate way. We are talking about changing something that started in the 1940s. In the 1940s, it probably made a lot of sense. We were not dealing with a global economy, and people would go to work in Oregon or Pennsylvania at a young age and stay put until you gave them a gold watch and a retirement dinner. The typical worker today changes their job 11 times by the time they are in their early forties. So they need a portable health plan they can take from place to place. We have done that in the Healthy Americans Act as well.

Chairman BAUCUS made a very important point in terms of making sure this is explained to people in a more simple and straightforward way than it has been in the past, certainly than as it was explained in 1993. Then fundamentally it has to be a commitment the Congress makes to our people to say: If you like what you have and employers want to keep offering it, they can do it. I hope they will. But nearly 7 percent of the employers have gotten out of the health business altogether in the last few years and thousands more have heaped on the copayments and the deductibles in the last few years.

We need to have more choices, and 16 Members of the Senate are working toward this goal. This is the first time in the history of this debate, in 60 years of the Senate debating this issue, there has ever been a piece of legislation where a large number of Democrats and Republicans have come together. Senator BENNETT in particular, the Senator from Utah, a member of the Republican leadership, deserves enormous credit for his efforts to help find common ground.

Now we have a chance for the debate as we go into September, with Chairman BAUCUS holding additional hearings in September, and all our colleagues being home and folks asking: What is going to be done about health care? We have a chance now to start that discussion about what it is going to take to fix American health care.

I submit that when people talk about their bills, they are talking about their gas bill, they are talking about their food bill, they are talking about their medical bill, and that medical bill is pumped up—that is the only way you can characterize it—by \$700 billion worth of spending that is inefficient and is of little or no value. The Federal Tax Code, as we heard from three of the experts yesterday, props up all that inefficiency. So reforming those Federal tax rules, as we seek to do in the Healthy Americans Act, is a key part of the solution.

I thank Chairman BAUCUS for his leadership for being willing to tackle an issue that lots of people, frankly, have ducked in past years. And I submit that finding a bipartisan solution to these outdated, unfair tax rules—rules that show how broken the health care system is—is a key to holding down the costs that people are so upset about and assure that we attain our goal, which is all Americans have high-quality affordable health care.

Mr. President, I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I have been in the House of Representatives and the Senate now for about a little over 15 years. One thing you can count on that I have seen over and over is you can always count on Republicans to stand up for Big Oil. We can look in recent memory. We can look at the Energy bill 3 years ago—earlier than that. We can look at the plan Vice President CHENEY wrote in the White House bringing in all the energy executives, not bringing in consumer groups, not bringing in environmentalists, not bringing in small businesses that are hit so hard by high energy costs, not bringing in truckers, not bringing in people who are paying the bills, but

bringing in the producers, writing an energy plan, that legislation then written by Big Oil and other big energy producers, pushed through a Republican House of Representatives 3 years ago and a Republican Senate, having given the President everything he wanted on an energy policy.

That is obviously the best example of how always in my 15 years here I have seen Republicans protecting Big Oil. Most recently in the last year and a half, as the Senator from Pennsylvania said so well earlier, we have seen eight filibusters blocking any proposals we have had on energy—short-term proposals, medium-term proposals, long-term proposals.

As the Presiding Officer, Senator CASEY from Pennsylvania, talked about, there is no silver bullet, but there are things we can do immediately. We can open the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, sell 10 percent of the oil from that Reserve, bringing down prices pretty quickly. We can go after the speculators. I am not sure Senator CASEY said this, but the President's Justice Department could go after the oil industry for some of the price gouging that many of us in this body, and probably most of the American public—certainly people in Steubenville and Lima and Zanesville, OH—think the oil companies are engaged in. We can do those things.

A few minutes ago, when I was the Presiding Officer, I heard the minority leader say that the Democrats are offering legislation claiming it is only speculation that is driving up prices. We have never done that. We have said: Yes, speculation is a big part of it. Senator DORGAN said speculation is like a washcloth: you wring it out and you will get an immediate 20, 30, or 40 percent price decrease overall just by wringing out the speculation.

But what the other side never talks about is that it is not just that we want to deal with speculation and open the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and have the Justice Department go after the increasingly, immensely profitable oil industry on price gouging, but we also have a very specific long-term energy plan.

As Senator DORGAN said, President Kennedy didn't say: Let's think about going to the Moon. He said: We are going to put a man on the Moon. It was the early 1960s, and he said we could do it by the end of the decade. And he did it. It happened by July 1969. I was 16 then. We had just gotten our first color television, I remember. My brother had convinced my parents that because of the Moon landing, we should get a color television. My parents didn't really know this wasn't going to be in color, but it was a good move by my brother, I must admit. But I remember looking up in the sky and not seeing anything other than the big white Moon, but how exciting it was that we could do this.

The same thing could be true with the President on alternative energy.

That is what the Democratic majority has been trying repeatedly to do, to take the money President Bush, Vice President CHENEY, and the Republican majorities in each U.S. House gave to big oil in 2005 in the Energy bill and put it into alternative energy development.

Senator WHITEHOUSE, speaking earlier this morning, mentioned that for every \$10,000 in profits Exxon has made, only \$1 of the \$10,000 has gone to research and development for alternative energy and \$3 has gone into advertising how green they are and how much they are doing on alternative energy. Senator CASEY talked about the incredible increase in oil drilling in the last few years; that the oil companies are drilling plenty, but they understand how to keep prices up.

So I am for more drilling, but I am not for drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf. I am for the oil companies drilling on the 68 million acres of Federal lands on which they already have leases. Let's do that first, and let's see where we are on that discussion of drilling. We can't drill ourselves out of this, it is clear.

Last point, Mr. President, and then I wish to speak for a moment about something related to energy; that is, throughout my time in the House of Representatives and the Senate in the last 15 or so years, I have always noticed that oil prices go up when one of four things happens: Either there is a refinery fire or there is a pipeline outage or there is a major catastrophe, such as Katrina, or there is an international incident that disrupts the flow of oil to our country. It is either a major refinery fire, a major pipeline outage, a major disaster such as Hurricane Katrina, or a major international incident that disrupts the flow of oil to our country.

None of those things has happened in the last couple of years. Sure, China and India are using more oil, and that is a long-term, huge issue in terms of the oil crisis, but to see the kinds of oil spikes we have seen in the last year and to look at what we have seen, frankly, in the 8 years of two oilmen in the White House—we know that story—nothing has happened that should have caused oil prices to go up that dramatically. If anything, that absolutely shows it is all, in large part, about speculation, and it is about the price gaming of the system that the oil industry and Wall Street have done.

As we talk about energy, we often talk about what that means to our Nation's infrastructure. Today marks the 1-year anniversary of the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis. Our freshman colleague, Senator KLOBUCHAR, has spoken eloquently about that and what we need to do about that. It took the lives, as we remember, of 13 people and injured nearly 100.

The Minnesota bridge collapse was a rude awakening to Americans about the current state of our critical infrastructure and the importance of improving all aspects of bridge safety.

Corrosion, for example, which causes metal in bridges to rust and ultimately weaken, is a significant problem for our Nation's bridges but one that is resolvable if addressed by Congress.

In 1998, there was an amendment to ISTEA, the highway bill. Congress commissioned a report about the cost of corrosion—a report from the Federal Highway Administration—and that report to Congress, conducted by CC Technologies of Dublin, OH, a community near Columbus, has estimated that corrosion costs the Nation an unbelievable 3-plus percent of gross domestic product annually, or \$442 billion last year. In my State alone, corrosion ultimately cost Ohio taxpayers, in damage to bridges and highways and other infrastructure, \$15.1 billion. For bridges alone, this country spent \$13 billion and \$500 million in Ohio in 2007. In that same report, the FHA estimated a third of that cost could be prevented through existing corrosion-control technologies.

There are many bills pending before this Congress that would lessen or prevent future corrosion of our Nation's infrastructure.

S. 3319 requires that any proposal to the Department of Transportation for bridge construction or modification or renovation include a corrosion mitigation and prevention plan. When a State highway department submits a proposal to the Department of Transportation about this, under this legislation—there is no demand or other mandate—it must include a corrosion mitigation and prevention plan that looks at how much money it will cost to do the corrosion prevention and mitigation and see how much money over the next 10, 20, or 30 years the taxpayers will save because these bridges will last longer and will be safer in the ensuing years. This plan would incorporate existing technologies to enhance the safety of bridges and save Ohio and the Nation billions of dollars a year at a time when highway funding is suffering severely from a dramatic rise in construction cost.

The reason I talked earlier about energy and connected it to these highway issues and bridge issues and water and sewer issues is that the gas tax—which certainly funds much of our highway and bridge infrastructure, the construction and maintenance—the tax dollars are not increasing, and it is because it is not a percentage of the cost of oil, of the cost of gas, it is the cost per gallon of gas purchased. So as people are using less, revenues are down, and obviously construction costs are up as asphalt and other oil-based materials are included in the construction.

S. 3316, a separate piece of legislation I have introduced, would provide a 50-percent tax credit to companies for the design, materials, and installation of corrosion-mitigation technology. The tax credits would encourage further work in corrosion mitigation, expanding beyond bridges to include all kinds of infrastructure affected by corrosion,

including drinking water and sewer systems, motor vehicles, pipelines, and defense infrastructure.

I know that the Senator from Pennsylvania, when he is in Erie or Sharon, close to my State, or when he is in eastern or central Pennsylvania, hears over and over from mayors, as I do, about the problems with infrastructure and what that means to the cost of people's water and sewer bills. Mayor Coleman of Columbus told me months ago what he was facing—more importantly, what consumers, what homeowners and renters in Columbus are facing—with the increased cost of water and sewer bills because of demands from the Federal Government on what we need to do to guarantee safe drinking water, demands local governments want to meet but at costs which they simply can't bear. So homeowners see double-digit increases in the cost of their water and sewer.

I met recently with the mayor of Defiance, Mayor Armstrong, in northwest Ohio at a roundtable—one of the hundred or so roundtables I have conducted in most of Ohio's 88 counties—and I talked to him about what these costs are meaning to him in terms of sewer and water bills for residents of Defiance and Defiance County.

A few months before that, I had a roundtable with the mayors of Fremont, Paulding, and Perrysburg, again in northwestern Ohio. Mayor Overmyer of Fremont, Mayor White of Paulding, and Mayor Evans of Perrysburg, where the meeting was conducted—Perrysburg City Hall in Wood County—were all telling me about the immense costs they were facing and, again, more importantly, their constituents were facing with the high cost of water and sewer.

Corrosion protection plans of this type can make a big difference in relieving the cost of all kinds of infrastructure. The new I-35 bridge project is under heightened scrutiny from everybody—public officials, the media, and obviously Minnesotans who travel that bridge regularly to and from work. Their new bridge will be equipped with the best technology available, including built-in sensors to measure corrosion.

With all these bridge projects in other places, we should have this level of attention and they should be outfitted with robust safety technology and anticorrosion technology. The technology is pretty far down the road. We are able to do an awful lot of things to arrest and almost stop corrosion and the aging of these bridges. Our legislation will not just utilize the technology that is available now, but it will spur on new technologies to arrest bridge corrosion.

Anticorrosion and corrosion-detection measures save money and lives. It is nothing but shortsighted to bypass such measures. For too long, we have governed in a way that has sort of gotten us through the day, thinking that we have to figure out how to get

through today and not looking ahead. Business doesn't look often enough beyond the next quarter, and government doesn't look often enough beyond the next election cycle. This is an opportunity for the Nation to use its research and development talent to address the unnecessary and enormously costly burden we bear as our infrastructure rusts away and needs to be replaced.

We remember the Minnesota bridge collapse of 1 year ago. This body can honor the memory of those who died there and learn our lesson from looking ahead and helping local and State governments adopt these anticorrosion measures. It will ultimately save lives and billions of taxpayer dollars. It is something we can do, and it is something we should begin today.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HOUSING AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY ACT OF 2008

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I wish to take a few minutes, if I may, before we conclude business here today, and then basically I guess we will be in either adjournment or recess until the first week in September. I wish to take a moment or so and review the events of the past number of weeks, culminating in the vote a week or so ago on the housing legislation. Of course, the Presiding Officer played a very important and supportive role, and I appreciate immensely his participation on the Banking Committee and the effort we made together to achieve what I think is a fairly historic piece of legislation.

The news from the housing and financial markets continues to be grim. Unfortunately, the new Case-Schiller Index—which most people are familiar with and which is used to determine the level of home values—Case-Schiller data earlier this week shows that home prices were down 15.8 Percent from May of last year, including a .9-percent, 1-month drop in the month of May alone. The 10-city price index, which dates to 1988, dropped 16.9 percent, its sharpest decline on record since those numbers have been kept over the last 20 years. All 20 cities measured by the index showed annual declines in home values, and 10 cities have suffered double-digit percentage declines over the last year.

Job data is not any better, I am sad to point out. It shows a loss of 50,000 jobs. The unemployment rate now is at 5.7 percent.

Earlier this week, the President signed the Housing and Economic Recovery Act. I am grateful to him for that signature. He earlier indicated he was going to veto the bill but changed his mind. I, for one, appreciate that

change of mind, because I think it is an important message to send to markets about the importance of this bill. I wish to quickly point out that the President didn't like every provision in this bill, nor did I necessarily, for that matter, but he signed it into law and for that we are grateful.

This legislation is a crucial response to the ongoing housing and economic crisis. Most of the legislation took effect immediately upon it being signed into law by the President. Already, the new regulator for the housing GSEs is on the job. We are not even a week into the bill and he is already there, preparing to write the numerous new regulations required by this law.

On Tuesday, before the President even signed the bill, I met with members of the oversight board of the new HOPE for Homeowners program: the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Chairman Bernanke; the Chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Sheila Bair; the Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary Paulson; and the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Secretary Preston. We all met in my office as the oversight board. I urged them to get to work immediately. They assured me they were doing that. In fact, the very next day they were having the very first meeting of the oversight board. I commend them for that. Anywhere from 400,000 to 600,000 families can keep their homes if, in fact, that program works as we all hope it will.

Next week, my staff is meeting with HUD staff to push them to complete the regulations to get out the \$3.9 billion in Community Development Block Grant funds. For Connecticut, as well as Pennsylvania and other States, these dollars could be very valuable in restoring neighborhoods and homes that have been foreclosed, getting them back on the market and producing those tax revenues every community needs in order to provide services to its people. The law requires HUD to have a formula for the distribution of this money ready in 60 days, and I intend to make sure this deadline is met, hence the reason for the meeting with the HUD staff.

The Housing and Economic Recovery Act has a number of provisions that will make a real difference in people's lives, and I want my colleagues to be able to explain them to their constituents as they travel around their States over the next several weeks. First and foremost, the bill establishes the HOPE for Homeowners Act to help 400,000 families keep their homes. It does so after asking both lenders and borrowers to make financial sacrifices, and it does so at absolutely no cost to taxpayers. This program will become effective on October 1.

In addition to providing a much stronger regulator, the bill increases the loan limits for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to \$625,000. These GSEs—government-sponsored enterprises—along with the Federal Housing Admin-

istration, have been about the only sources of mortgage credit available to most Americans. This will make this credit more widely available to more families seeking to buy or to refinance their homes.

The bill modernizes and expands the Federal Housing Administration programs, raising the loan limits from \$362,000 to \$625,000, so that 98 percent of the counties in our country and 85 percent of the population of our Nation will have access to this very critical program. FHA has proved its value over and over again, particularly in the current crisis, as it has continued to be a stable source of mortgage credit, even while many of the lenders have failed. By raising these loan limits, that credit line now becomes available, as I said, to more than 85 percent of the population of our country.

The bill also includes a permanent, affordable housing fund financed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. This is the first time ever in the history of our Nation we have established a permanent affordable housing program. Ninety percent of these dollars will go for the construction of rental housing. This will take a little time to get in place and will not immediately come on line as other provisions of the bill will, but for the long-term needs of our country, including the ability to build affordable housing every single year as a result of GSE money, is going to provide great relief for those who can't afford a home, those who are starting out and need to have affordable rental housing.

The bill includes new protections for elderly homeowners taking out the FHA-insured reverse mortgages so they are not deceived into using the proceeds from these loans to buy expensive and needless insurance products. It will require mortgage brokers to be licensed. Again, that is a major reform in this legislation.

The bill expands the ability of the VA housing programs. It includes a number of provisions to help our returning veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere to save their homes from foreclosure. Tragically, you would be amazed at how many of our service men and women serving in harm's way are at risk of losing their properties while they are serving overseas. This bill changes that by providing new housing benefits to our veterans.

The legislation includes \$3.9 billion, as I mentioned, in Community Development Block Grant funds. These are dollars that go directly back to our communities to allow them to rehabilitate homes and revitalize neighborhoods that have been devastated by the foreclosure problem. Remember, 8,000 to 9,000 people every day end up in foreclosure—8,000 to 9,000 homes every day. Certain neighborhoods in our States and in our cities have been literally devastated by foreclosures. These dollars will help to get those neighborhoods back on their feet.

Finally, the bill includes \$150 million in counseling money to organizations out there trying to bring lenders and borrowers together.

Let me take advantage of this moment to urge my colleagues to do what I am going to be doing in my own State, and that is doing public service announcements, asking my media outlets on a daily basis to inform people as to what they can do. If they are delinquent in their mortgages, they may very well qualify for this program we have passed in the Congress, where they can save that house. It is not going to be free of charge; they are going to have some obligations to meet. It is not for everyone. You have to be an owner-occupier. It is not for speculative investments people have made. I urge people to call their banks, call one of these nonprofits, call the office of your Congressman or Senator, and they will tell you how to get in touch with them, but don't allow another month or two to go by on a delinquent basis. You may end up losing a home that you need to have, and it is possible to save that property if you will step up.

So I urge my colleagues, if they are interested in doing what they can for their constituents in the month of August, to find the time to talk about this program, let your constituents know it exists, urge them to step forward, urge your lenders to be in touch with borrowers to see if we can't avoid the kind of continuing foreclosure issues that are going to make our economic recovery difficult.

I will end on this note: The heart of our economic problems, whether it is the unemployment problems, the staggering lack of commercial development that is going on, the problem with student loans—all of it relates back to the foreclosure issue. The sooner we can stop this hemorrhaging of foreclosures in the country, the quicker we are going to get back on our feet economically. So this is not just about saving homes or keeping people in their homes; it is also dealing with the contagion effect that has spread over to other aspects of our economy.

I wanted to take advantage of these closing moments to talk about the bill, to talk about what is in it, and urge our colleagues—Democrats, Republicans—whether you are for the bill or against the bill, there is an opportunity now to make a difference for the people you represent.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MISSED ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise today to put some facts on the

table about the high cost of energy. I know many of my colleagues have left town, but some are still here. And even though today is August 1, I doubt that it is the last we are going to hear on this debate. I expect that we will hear about it all during August.

I come to the floor this afternoon to just put a few last remarks into the RECORD about what I think this debate has been about and what I think it will be about when we return. I know some of my colleagues have put out statements today about what they think we should do in moving forward. I think it is very important to address the issue of the high cost of energy and to put forth a realistic plan for our country to move forward.

Many times this week we heard the slogan: Find more and use less. It reminds me of the slogans we hear on oil company commercials who spend hundreds of millions of dollars saying things such as "beyond petroleum," and "look at the future we are planning." They are spending all of that money trying to convince us they have a plan, when in reality they are keeping us addicted to oil.

Mr. President, now is not the time to worry about big oil. They just posted astronomical second quarter profits. ExxonMobil alone made about \$130 million a day—not bad for a hard day's work impacting consumers. In fact, since the Bush Administration came into office, oil industry profits have totaled \$641 billion. And as this chart shows every year's profit was greater than the last.

The complexity of this issue is that many colleagues really think that drilling more is going to solve our nation's energy crisis. But the clear facts is it is not going to; drilling more will just continue to add to the profits of these companies at a time when we should be investing in clean energy solutions.

So now is not the time to give the American people the false hope that drilling is going to have any effect on oil prices or provide any drop of relief at the pump. Now is not the time to play politics and to try to continue to play the blame game.

Instead now is the time to realize that our economy can't take much more of this. We simply have to get off of oil. It is time, after 8 years of an administration with a dead-end oil policy, that we understand the long-term cost of our addiction to oil and how it is strangling our economy and our vitality. Because unless we change course, and change course soon, we soon will be sending \$1 trillion abroad to cover our foreign oil addiction. No amount of drilling—no amount—in the United States will change that fact.

Just a few years ago I would come to the floor and talk about how we were 50-percent dependent, heading toward 60-percent dependent on foreign oil. Now we are talking about being 70-percent dependent and even more unless we change course.

I think it is safe to say that the last 8 years of this administration has done great damage to the continuation of our addiction to foreign oil. We have tried their approach. It doesn't work. So what we need to do today is move ahead.

We need to admit the United States consumes one-quarter of the world's oil but only has less than 2 percent of the world's oil reserves. We will never, ever be able to affect the world oil price. Even if we drilled in every corner of God's creation in the United States, we would not be able to affect the world price of oil.

Americans can do the math. They know we need to be aggressively putting new policies into place that will make us a 21st century leader in new energy solutions. That is what we should be doing in the Senate as well.

Unfortunately, it seems as though many of my colleagues aren't doing this simple math. Instead, they are trying to exploit the current crisis and convince us that we should continue this oil addiction. That the answer is to give big oil one of their top legislative priorities—one they have wished for for several decades breaking the quarter-century-old moratorium on drilling off of America's pristine coast.

Pro-drilling advocates and certainly the President of the United States seem perfectly comfortable perpetrating what I think is a cruel hoax on the American people. They are willing to imply, to insinuate, and to outright pretend that drilling off our coastlines will help provide some relief at the pump. They are willing to pretend that drilling will somehow lessen our dangerous dependence on foreign oil.

Though my colleagues on the other side of the aisle do not like to admit this, the American people can listen to experts at the Department of Energy who say:

Access to the Pacific, Atlantic, and eastern Gulf Coast regions would not have a significant impact on domestic crude oil and natural gas production or prices before 2030.

We heard that 2030 is the magic year by which drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf would produce supply. But our own Energy Information Administration said that access to the Pacific, Atlantic, and eastern gulf coast regions would not have a significant impact on the price before 2030.

I know we had a lot of discussion about the psychological impact, but oil industry experts have testified before Congress that the notion of more drilling would have no psychological effect on world oil prices. That is from oil analysts who have written books about oil and covered it for many years.

But even in 22 years the offshore drilling scheme will not provide consumers relief. This is what the Energy Information Administration said:

Because oil prices are determined on the international market, any impact on average wellhead prices is expected to be insignificant.

So the notion that somehow our drilling is going to help us relieve the

price when we are such a small player on the world market is really a hoax. We are not going to be able to have any significant impact on the price.

Even if we drilled in every last corner of our great Nation it would not have any impact. We will never be able to drill our way out of the fact that our addiction to oil leaves critical aspects of our economy in the hands of OPEC.

We do not have 22 years to wait. We need to be aggressive in getting off oil and move ahead. I know many of my colleagues really think the drilling that has been talked about here will provide relief, and they assume that oil companies would invest the tens of billions of dollars it would take to drill up and down our coastlines. I guess we should ignore for the moment that these same oil companies are not even utilizing 83 percent of the leases they already have.

But the truth is that all the drilling will do, even post-2030, is lead to 1 percent of what the United States needs. That is right, if we go ahead and lift the moratorium on Outer Continental Shelf drilling and that process starts and we get to 2030, the United States will still need over 22 million barrels of oil a day. That is what our growth rate is expected to be under the status quo. Drilling in the 600-million-acre moratorium areas would only meet 1 percent of U.S. needs in 2030. All that money, all that risk of catastrophic spills, all the years of waiting, and that is the payoff—1 percent.

It is not good enough, and the American people need and deserve better solutions. That is what, when we return, we have to focus on.

There is a way out of this hole. It is definitely not drilling deeper, and it is time to say enough is enough and that we have to change course. My colleagues who use a chart that says "Find More, Use Less" on the other side of the aisle have the same empty slogan as those oil company ads that pretend they are the solution.

In fact, I think the solution my colleagues on the other side of the aisle ought to consider is: Find more and hold up less. They ought to hold up less legislation that allows us to move forward on a renewable energy strategy. Find more renewable energy and sources of power and production for the United States that can impact the price consumers are paying now, can impact what they are going to have to pay in 2009, and what they can do to get us moving off our oil addiction.

I say hold up less, because if we look at what has happened in the last year or two, we have had many proposals to move ahead off oil and on to clean energy sources that would have impacted the price at the pump. In fact, what this chart shows is the dozen times the other side of the aisle held up critical clean energy bills.

Starting in June of 2007, when we had a \$28 billion clean energy package that we tried to pass. This bill would have eliminated some of the subsidies that

oil companies got embedded in the Tax Code, because if we are at \$126 or \$140 a barrel of oil, it is pretty hard to argue that oil companies still need tax incentives.

One of the best parts of this legislative package created a consumer tax credit of up to \$7,500 toward the purchase of plug-in electric vehicle. That was a provision I authored with Senator HATCH and Senator OBAMA. I know many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have talked a lot recently about the great promise of plug-in hybrids and electric vehicles as a way to get us off our addiction to oil.

I talked about that 1 percent that was going to be supplied by drilling by 2030. If we invested in plug-in electric vehicles over roughly the same period of time, using electricity from our grid for fuel, we could have a 50-percent reduction in the amount of foreign oil we would need to import.

So the Republican plan by 2030 is to drill everywhere to reduce foreign oil needs by 200,000 barrels of oil per day. Our plan, which is investment in clean and alternative energy solutions, like the plug-in electric vehicles would reduce foreign oil imports by 6.5 million barrels of oil a day over the same time period.

The difference is unbelievable what we could have achieved if the Republicans would have stopped holding up these policies.

And my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are saying: We are not supporting plug-in electric vehicles unless you give us offshore drilling. They are saying we are holding hostage the great ideas and promise of the future of reducing our oil dependence unless you agree to continue the old, insane practices of giving incentives to oil companies with record profits to continue to provide the non-solutions to one of our nation's greatest problems.

It is time to get the solutions out of the hands of the oil companies and into the hands of the American public who want tools to reduce their oil consumption.

Literally, my colleagues voted no for cars that could get over 100 miles per gallon on the equivalent of \$1 of gasoline. That is right, that is what a plug-in hybrid will get you. That analysis and study is there, that our nation's electricity grid today has enough spare capacity to power 70 percent of cars on the road today if they were electric hybrids. So instead of paying \$3.99 for a gallon of gas, you would only pay about one dollar for the same amount of electricity.

This was just one realistic proposal the majority offered to move our nation to where we need to go. But every time they vote no on one of these proposals, we slow up the process. Voting no in June of 2007 was holding us up to going to that transition.

So I am glad other people on the other side of the aisle realize the promise of plug-in electrics, but they are not voting to help us break through

and implement these solutions that could help us today and break the shackles of big oil.

As I mentioned, this was a bipartisan bill that Senators HATCH, OBAMA, and I introduced over a year ago. Our bill provides scalable credits that increase up to \$15,000 for large vehicles. We had this big discussion about what cars Americans drive, how big, how small, safety issues, farm vehicles, big transportation vehicles. The great thing about plug-in hybrids and battery technology moving us forward is we can put those in any size vehicle. We are not going to be limited to a small car. The legislation would also provide assistance for automakers and parts manufacturers to retool their facilities to speed up the transition time.

So the Hatch-Cantwell-Obama bill would have been very progressive in getting solutions out into the marketplace that could have gotten us toward that goal we need to get to quickly.

Unfortunately, in December of 2007, there was another blocked attempt for us to change this policy. In December of last year, the majority of Senate Republicans blocked what would have created a renewable electricity standard. That is something even President Bush, when he was Governor of Texas, supported and today Texas is the nation's largest wind energy producer for our country. But Republican obstructionism cost us over 90,000 megawatts of new renewable energy capacity by 2020. That is the equivalent of 135 new coal-fired powerplants.

If they had not blocked this legislation in December of last year, we could have been on our way in 2020 to reducing the amount of coal-fired powerplants that we would have had in our country and getting on to renewable wind energy. The billions of dollars in clean energy investment, tens of thousands of jobs could be making an incredible positive impact, more so than any drilling offshore could ever be.

Then, just a few days later, there was another blocked attempt to move toward a clean energy transition when Republicans blocked a smaller clean energy tax incentive package that also would have ended subsidies to the big oil companies that have made these record profits. Even this scaled-back approach was too much for big oil, and they basically made their voice heard on Capitol Hill. Big oil refused to give up what was \$13 billion in unwarranted tax breaks over 10 years, despite hundreds of billions in profits over the last 8 years.

Mr. President, the American people should know that Senators that voted against that bill voted against solar power, against wind power, against making homes and our commercial buildings more efficient. Against incentives for homeowners to lower their home heating and cooling bills and against making the electricity grid smarter, less prone to blackouts, and against plug-in vehicles.

Last February, there was another successful effort to block \$6 billion of

clean energy tax incentives on the stimulus bill. This time we gave up and said: You know what, forget the oil company subsidies, we would like to get rid of them, but you don't want to get rid of them, so let's put this as part of the stimulus package and let's stimulate our economy by moving forward. The stimulus bill reported by the Finance Committee had \$6 billion in clean energy incentives that would have provided a short-term extension of expiring tax credits and help us stimulate the clean energy economy instead of having it bleed a slow death.

But we failed to pass that legislation. It would have helped us with the creation of 100,000 green-collar jobs and \$20 billion in energy investment over the next year. If \$20 billion was not stimulus and 100,000 green energy jobs, I don't know what was. Yet that was another big hold on our ability to move forward.

The bottom line is, we cannot keep up this slogan of saying: Find more, use less. We need to find more clean energy and hold up less legislation that will let us get there. Quit holding hostage clean energy legislation that is the truer predictor of domestic energy production, of if we are going to continue to be hostage to foreign oil, of if we are going to make progress of moving the United States forward. But again our colleagues held us up on moving to that legislation.

In fact, it was interesting that during the time of this vote, some of my colleagues were actually out campaigning at a solar plant. The CEO at the solar plant during that debate said:

The only question before us today is if the Senate, which is debating an economic stimulus bill at this very moment, understands green and can be green. Federal tax credits for solar energy are about to expire which will send the growing solar energy into a tailspin, especially here in California. But the Senate can ensure we keep the economic engine moving forward and extend the solar tax credits as part of the economic stimulus bill.

We know what the result was. We didn't pass that legislation. And the blockage continued.

In June of this year, blocking continued on a tri-partisan bill on the Senate floor. That is right, a climate change bill authored by an Independent, Republican, and a Democrat that would have had a low carbon fuel standard in it that would have saved an estimated 5 million barrels of oil per day by 2020. That is equal to nearly 85 percent of our daily oil imports from OPEC. Another missed opportunity, because that legislation didn't pass.

On June 10, we had another opportunity to try to pass clean energy legislation that would have helped us in reducing our critical energy needs. There were hundreds of businesses that were up here on the Hill asking for us to pass this legislation, telling us that new job creation and reduction of fuel costs depended on it, and yet, again, we had a blockage of this legislation. And it seemed, in fact, that many people

cared more about the hedge fund managers' ability to use offshore accounts to avoid paying taxes than they did whether we were going to solve this energy problem by making an investment in new energy. So again we had a blocked vote that prohibited us from taking action and taking our country in a new direction.

That same day we tried a second vote and again were blocked in a comprehensive effort to get oil companies to either reinvest a portion of their astronomical profits into these needed areas of infrastructure or pay the tax so we could help clean energy solutions. And you guessed it, it was also blocked and held up.

About 6 weeks ago, on June 17, there was another blocked attempt when we tried to come up with a resolution to the long overdue extensions of clean energy tax incentives. Again, a strict party-line discipline maintained a filibuster, and companies across America started to lose hope that we were going to keep this investment cycle.

The problem is, without the tax incentives every year, where we have failed to produce a coherent policy on clean energy, we have seen astronomical drops in investment. As this chart of wind energy investment shows there was a 73-percent drop in 2001 to 2002, and a 77-percent drop from 2003 to 2004, the two times Congress allowed the Production Tax Credit to expire. And this is where we have gotten in 2007—this level of investment in wind energy resources. Yet now it is collapsing right in front of us because certain Senators would not pass legislation to make continued investments and continued predictable policy that the clean energy industry can use to put up new power plants.

In fact, around this time I got a letter from a company that I think illustrates the mistake we made. It came from a solar company named Abengoa and the Arizona Public Service, a local utility company. They told me that the Senate's failure to pass clean energy tax incentives was going to lead to the cancellation of a 280-megawatt concentrating solar plant near Phoenix. That is a \$1 billion investment down the drain, and 2,000 construction jobs that will not happen, as well as 80 full-time jobs lost that would have run the plant.

So we tried many times, but they continued blocking these critical bills. The filibustering just this week just further illustrates this issue.

It is frustrating because we have even heard from those who have been in the oil industry such as T. Boone Pickens and others who say that unless we aggressively act to reduce our dependence on oil and get off of foreign petroleum, we could see, as Mr. Pickens told us at one of our Senate hearings last week, \$300-a-barrel oil.

I don't think any of my colleagues want to see that. So I hope my colleagues go home and understand that our future lies in providing opportunities to find more renewable production,

not drilling hoaxes. I hope they will quit holding clean energy hostage for the oil company executives; quit holding up the good legislation that could move our country forward.

I hope my colleagues will come back to the Senate in September with the notion in mind that reducing by 50 percent our dependence on foreign oil by accelerating the transition to plug-in electric vehicles should be our goal. That they will realize that holding up good legislation hostage for the 1 percent—the 1 percent—we might get from our Outer Continental Shelf drilling is risking our country's future.

This is the time to make the transition, and I hope my colleagues will hear that and understand it is not time to keep perpetrating hoaxes backed by and focused on by the oil companies. Rather its time to stop the politics and get serious about implementing a plan that gets our country off our dependence on oil. So I hope when we get back in September the other side of the aisle will quit holding up these critical clean energy bills and work with us to move forward on a desperately needed new energy strategy for the United States that will provide real price relief for Americans.

I thank the Presiding Officer, and I yield the floor.

RAILROAD SAFETY ENHANCEMENT ACT

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Commerce Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2095, and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2095) to amend title 49, United States Code, to prevent railroad fatalities, injuries, and hazardous material releases, to authorize the Federal Railroad Safety Administration, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a Lautenberg-Smith substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate, and any statements related to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 5259) was agreed to. (The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill (H.R. 2095), as amended, was read the third time and passed.

ELWOOD "BUD" LINK DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Veterans' Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2245 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2245) to designate the Department of Veterans Affairs outpatient clinic in Wenatchee, Washington, as the Elwood "Bud" Link Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time, passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2245) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

SSI EXTENSION FOR ELDERLY AND DISABLED REFUGEES ACT

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2608 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2608) to amend section 402 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 to provide, in fiscal years 2008 through 2010, extensions of supplemental security income for refugees, asylees, and certain other humanitarian immigrants, and to amend the Internal Revenue Code to collect unemployment compensation debts resulting from fraud.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise to extend my appreciation that the Senate will pass the "SSI Extension for Elderly and Disabled Refugees Act." I thank Chairman BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY for their help in moving this important legislation to the President. This is a bill that I introduced in the Senate with Senator KOHL and it will make a significant impact in helping our most vulnerable asylees and refugees. I also want to thank Senator SPECTER for his tremendous support of this bill and help in negotiating a final package. The passage of this bill sends a message that we have not and will not turn our back on those whom we have welcomed to our country.

As many of you may know, Congress modified the Supplemental Security